3. Power

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Power within the tribal community at the time of my stay in Namaland, was, as it had been for generations, in the hands of a chief, gao-aob or 'gao-b, a "captain," and of a council of older men, with whom the captain discussed all important matters, sometimes leading in an arrogant way, sometimes led by the others, according to his personality. The right to sit in the council is not tied to specific conditions. Ability, experience and age qualify one. But in many particulars this ancient Hottentot form of government is today strongly influenced by the Cape Dutch models and Christian elements (cf. the followers of Hendrik Witbooi) (72).

72. H. v. François, Nama und Damara, Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Magdeburg (ohne Jahrangabe).

If the Hottentot kraals which are under one captain are far apart, the captain places a relative as a kind of governor in charge of the distant one. In this way the ruling family branches out into clans that are widely separated and distinguished by special names (frequently borrowed from their ancestors). The Topnaars differentiate the relations of their captain in this way: /hai bego, ũũ//(e)ĩn and !nuabego.

The decision about war and peace, about migrations and trade relationships, the settlement of legal quarrels and the setting of punishments was, until recently, the authorized power of the captain and of his council. The last attempt at rebellion by the Hottentots against white rule will have completely eradicated the native form of government. With Hendrik Witbooi, in his own way a respectable person, its last representative has departed.

C. The Relationship of the Hottentots to the Foreign Races in their Home and Neighborhood

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This relationship will only concern us briefly and only in its personal aspect, to the extent that it adds to the picture of native character.

It is assumed without argument that the Hottentots have given expression to their own pride in the phrase by which they call themselves, [322] elevating themselves above all other people: Khoĩ-khoĩn, "people of peoples," in the same glorifying sense that we use when speaking of the "Book of Books." This concept must be modified. If one asks a Hottentot: "mã ǃhaos khoĩtas?", i.e. literally "A man of what tribe are you?", he answers

2. Schapera E-4, 5 (no date) 1930
FX13 Hottentot FX13
Nama
Cape Hottentots

between different kraals, and relations with neighbouring tribes or with the European settlers. In this council the authority of the chief was dependent mainly upon his personality. His normal duties were to direct and sum up the deliberations of its members, who sat around him in a circle. If he was a man of strong character, he could succeed in imposing his will upon the others; otherwise his opinion might be disregarded, and he had to abide by the decision of the majority. 643 69 622 695

When not occupied with tribal affairs of this nature, the chief was concerned merely with the government of his own local group, i.e. of the kraal where he resided. In this respect he played the part of an ordinary kraal headman. Every large Hottentot kraal had its own recognised headman or "captain" (usually spoken of in the early Cape Records by the Dutch title "kapitein"), whose status was hereditary in the same way as that of the chief. The ceremonies of accession, as described by Kolb, were also similar to those of the chief, except that the headman had to make his pledge before the adult men of the kraal, and to provide the feast for them. All these men constituted a loosely-organised council over which he presided. They acted in the first instance as a court of justice. They met to settle disputes of right and property between the inhabitants of the kraal, and tried and punished criminal offences committed within their jurisdiction. The verdict arrived at was pronounced by the headman, and where the death penalty was imposed his was the first hand to smite down the culprit. There was no appeal from their decision or sentence to the main tribal council. They also dealt with all matters affecting the common interests of the kraal, such as removal to new pasture grounds, public feasts and sacrificial offerings. The rôle of the headman in this council was roughly similar to that of the chief in the tribal council, and the degree of his authority was determined by the strength of his character. In time of war he also had the command, under the chief of the tribe, of the troops supplied from his kraal. [643] 631 632 692 [623]

Neither the chief nor the headmen had special insignia or other marks of office, except that their karosses were made of leopard or wild cat skins; but the Dutch, when they entered into alliances with the Hottentot tribes, presented to the former a crown of copper, and to each of the latter a copper-headed cane, which henceforth were regarded as distinguishing badges of authority. The chief was not entitled to the personal services of his subjects, nor, says Kolb, did he receive anything in the nature of tribute or public 693 [638] 654

4: Hoernlé E-5 (1912-1913)1925
FX13 Hottentot FX13
Nama

with information given to us by the early travellers among the Hottentots. 361

In the old days a Nama encampment was in the form of a great circle. The whole was enclosed with a great fence of thorn in which there were two gateways, one to the north, the other to the south. Within this fence, round the circumference, were the huts of the */Haus*, or tribe. There might on certain occasions be a whole tribe encamped in such a manner, and, in any case, there were usually some representatives of each of the sibs at the chief's headquarters, though there might be other encampments in other parts of the tribal territory. In the great open space in the centre the cattle were herded at night. Special kraals were made for the calves and the lambs, but neither now nor in the past did the Hottentots make kraals for the cattle or the sheep. These animals just lie in front of the owner's hut for the night.

The following is the order in which the sibs of the Swartboois 621 camped. In the western portion of the circle stood the huts of the 614 chief's sib, facing east. On his left, as one faces east, came in order the *Xo Gaon*, the *//Naigoman*, the *Kharuxin*, the */Gari Karin*, the */Noin oin*. On his right in order came the *Gaoman*, the *//Khow Tanaon*, the */Gari Goin*, and the *Xo ai Tanaon*, meeting the */Noin oin* in the east of the circle. The Topnaars encamped in the order *//Haruibin Goin*, *//Haruibin /Gaon*, */Naonkon*, */Ubanon*, */Haibin*, starting from the *//Haruibin Goin* in the west and continuing round the circle to the left.

Through the whole course of Nama history the sib was the strongest social unit the Nama ever attained. Time and time again a strong sib would go off on its own, asserting its independence of the others, and sib loyalty was always stronger than tribal loyalty. It is no wonder, then, that the chief among the [622] Hottentots was little more than *primus inter pares*. He was acknowledged to be the head of the senior sib and, if a person of fine character, was accorded a great deal of respect, but the heads [623] of the other sibs acted as his council and he could not do much without their coöperation. The whole conduct of affairs, then, in a Nama tribe was, and is, the concern of the elder men of the tribe.

9: Ten Rhyne D-5 (1673) 1933
FX13 Hottentot FX13
Cape Hottentot

Their officers they call, after our fashion, Captains.[41] They differ from the rest, so far as dress is concerned, only in the splendour of their kaross. In arms the difference is very slight. The native equivalent of a sword is a club, and the common soldiers carry one with knots at the top, the officers one without. But the difference in authority and in the numerous body-guard is great: the captains always have five, six, or more of the older men to attend on them.[42] In this way they resemble the ancient Romans, who entrusted counsel to age, arms to youth.

The Most Noble Society has now but one enemy, Honnema and his people.[43] From him, shortly before my arrival, our men, at the Governor's instance, took a booty of more than 1,000 oxen and cows, not to mention sheep.[44] By this they were greatly emboldened to face the probability of being soon again despatched against these people. The two auxiliary officers, Captain Claes and Captain Cuyper, collected forces to this end, wherewith to reinforce our men. In war the Hottentots use the following procedure: Women serve as ambassadors; if they are captured, they are restored without ransom.[45]

CHAP. XVII.

Modes of Buying and Selling.

Since all their riches consist in cattle we carry on no trade with these natives except in cattle. This is done in the following way.[46] Our Governor sends to them one or more experienced traders, accompanied by a few soldiers, with a supply of tobacco, that is, Virginian (called by them boubosse tabaki), in very small quantity, for they never ask

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[41] This term was introduced by the Dutch, who called the headmen of every large Hottentot kraal "kapitein" (a practice later adopted by the Hottentots themselves), and on entering into alliance with him gave him a copper-headed cane, which henceforth was regarded as a distinguishing badge of authority.

[42] These men would be the council of elders who assisted the chief in governing the affairs of the tribe.

[43] See above, p. 111.

[44] This refers to the punitive expedition sent against Gonnema in July, 1673, which returned with a booty officially estimated at 200 cattle and 800 sheep. (D., July 30, 1673.)

[45] In April, 1677, the overseer of the Dutch outpost at Saldanha Bay[illegible] reported that "several of the women of the hostile Gonnema tribe had come to the kraal of Captain Claes, to treat for peace" (Dagrede, Record, 348), which would seem to confirm Van Riebeeck's statement.

[46] Van Riebeeck's account of the cattle-trade is supported in the main by the contemporary records, although it contains some details not found in the official documents.